

The Spectre at the Feast

I worked in jobs from the age of 15 to the age of 65. Mostly low paid unskilled jobs. Even during the three years when I was an art student getting my degree at Plymouth I still worked in part-time cleaning jobs to make ends meet. The student grant and the student loan together were not sufficient to pay the rent and put food on the table.

From 2014 to 2018 I worked at Exeter College in a part-time job as a cleaner. I was in the art and design building every day, vacuuming the floor, wiping down the tables and emptying the bins. I also sometimes worked in the music building, cleaning the recording studios and performance areas. It was a little part-time job which got me through the final four years of working for a living. In 2018 I reached retirement age and the system we have in Britain rewarded my 50 years of work in dull, low-paid, jobs by allowing me to claim my pension. In 2015 I had been cleaning the art and design building every day for months and months when I was startled to see that an exhibition was being put up under the title and theme of "On the Cards". The idea was that they would exhibit work by artists who worked at the college and wore an identity card hanging around their neck on a lanyard. The main corridor on the ground floor of the art and design building was the exhibition space and all of the exhibits were by various staff members who wore the lanyard and card.

They didn't ask me to put any of my work in the exhibition. I was only a cleaner.

We cleaners are almost invisible. Like ghosts. People easily blank us from their minds. "Oh, it's only a cleaner".

We are the "other" staff members who don't matter. We are necessary but of no special consequence. We are human beings. We have a life. Some of us are absurdly over qualified for our jobs. We do what other people don't want to and we do it for a mere pittance. I liked being a cleaner. I'm autistic and I've never been a very sociable person. I like being a semi-visible ghost who is easily ignored. It suits me. People left me alone to get on with my work most of the time and didn't tend to ask me a lot of foolish questions.

Nevertheless, when the college put on an exhibition specifically themed around workers wearing that identity card and when I was there every day, cleaning that exhibition space, knowing that I've got an honours degree in fine art. I really felt degraded by the classism of the thing.

I made a simple piece of visual work to capture that feeling. It is comprised of two images captured on my iPad in 2015. Placed next to each other these two images tell you the story. This piece is called "The Spectre at the Feast" and continues themes of reflection and shadow from my degree show work. This could be considered an anthropological document relating to post-modern man's continuance of the class system in Britain. I have other material related to this also, other pieces which I might put up on the web at some stage.

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